

EDITORIAL

The first 19th century automobiles did not really have to look like they did. An internal combustion engine could have been enveloped by myriads of entities: tracks, cables, rooftops, characters, houses, liquids, exchanges and conversations, etc. Before being couched in any particular appearance it was an open-ended mechanism which simultaneously existed as a certain idea of movement and transformation, as a condensation of economic potentialities, a model of the universe, a real body of scientific knowledge and many other things.

But at the end of the 19th century the internal combustion engine merely replaced a horse in an automobile that otherwise did not differ from a carriage.

It seems that someone managed to both create a new machine and fail to imagine it. The engine, which *already* was a new economy, a new geography, new social architecture, was in the case of these first automobiles articulated only with the forms of the past: intricate woodwork, proportions and qualities of the horse's body, surfaces of cobbled streets, etc. It is as if imagination was still recognizing appearances that were no longer relevant.

Google and other search engines & applications still use the outline of a magnifying glass as an icon. From this image of a magnifying glass we can deduce a human eye and hand, a way of reading, a spectrum of bodily movements, the ancient part vs. whole dialectic, reified archives

of knowledge and so on. But at the same time this image serves as an icon for search systems which process the whole of information without the part/whole or inside/outside distinctions, without the limitations of anthropomorphic architecture and without the sleeves of beginning and end. It seems that imagination is stuttering again unable to find relevant figures for the mechanisms that already exist. (The “search” notion itself is not a very precise analogy—it would be more exact to use “connection engines” instead of “search engines”.)

Or then again maybe when we look at search icons we don’t associate the figure stamped in them with the magnifying glass anymore? Maybe that round shape with a spike coming out of it is part of a different syntax and a new history now, without Sherlock Holmes or wooden shelves attached?

These are some of the loosely-formulated questions we were trying to think through in this second edition of *The Federal*. And Paul Sietsema’s work—which, we found, is somewhere in between things and meanings (and in the middle of this issue too), short-circuiting existing mediums with foreign ideas and objects with their representations—was the engine behind everything written and printed here.

—*The Editors*